



## YEAR OF THE TIGER

John Isaac's photography once helped save the world, but now he wants it to save the world's big cats

BY RUSSELL HART

► The wet whorl spun by this Bengal tiger's tail is a reminder that contrary to popular belief, cats big and small love water — at least the ones inhabiting warmer climes, in this case India's Bandhavgarh National Park. The frozen spray also proves that a high shutter speed, here 1/640 of a second, can expose hidden beauty.

Captured this past summer by former U.N. chief photographer John Isaac, the tiger (at 20 months old, still a cub) has just stepped out of a cooling lake. She is one of many that Isaac has followed in recent years on semiannual visits to his native country. Her grandfather is the park's most famous feline resident, Sundar (or B2), a tiger who lost his brother to poachers. Poaching has reduced the number of wild tigers in India to less than 1,500, according to Isaac. "It's been said that one tiger is killed every day for use in Chinese medicine," he says. "The carcass is smuggled into China by land through Tibet — all to make some bastard feel virile." (Visit [tigersincrisis.com/trade\\_tigers.htm](http://tigersincrisis.com/trade_tigers.htm) for more information.)

The Chinese zodiac's Year of the Tiger started on Feb. 14, and Isaac hopes it will be an auspicious one for the endangered cats. It should be for Isaac himself, since later this year he hopes to publish his first book of tiger photographs. Its contents will have been shot mainly with two Olympus E-3 bodies and two lenses, the Zuiko 300mm f/2.8 ED and the 50-200mm f/2.8-3.5 ED, plus a 1.4X teleconverter. "Lately I've been shooting almost everything handheld, sometimes resting the camera on a friend's shoulder," says the photographer, who seems as steady on the back of an elephant as he is on the ground. "It lets me react more quickly, and the in-camera stabilization keeps everything really sharp."

Some photographers don't believe that Isaac, whose work is on display at the Hotchkiss School's Tremaine Gallery through March 6, gets such sharp results without a tripod. Of course, some people don't think endangered animals are really in trouble. Both assumptions are wrong. AP